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AUTHOR Beswick, Richard
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ABSTRACT

Schools play an important role in combatting racism, which, despite a quarter century of desegregation, may be increasing. Possible solutions offered in this report are: public declarations of repugnance for racism; multicultural educational programs; use of teachers as role-models; and effective use of tolerance-generating resources. Several other motivational and confrontational strategies used by educators to change racist behavior are discussed. Schools can preserve ethnic identity without sacrificing social integration by offering programs that recognize the distinction between the meanings of culture and ethnicity. Multicultural education must distinguish between culture and ethnicity if it is to preserve ethnic identity while facilitating social integration. Multicultural education offers excellent ways to uncover prejudice and to stimulate appreciation for racial and ethnic differences. (12 references) (LMI)

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EA 021 582

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By Richard Beswick

An eight-year-old black girl in South Africa recently told Ted Koppel on Nightline, "White people are better than black people. Whites know more, have more, and get more. I wish I was white but I am not." American children of color do not have to contend with apartheid, but they still do not live in a prejudice-free society.

A quarter century of desegregation has not yet solved the self-deprecation, low levels of educational performance, or overall quality of life for America's people of color. Racism in any measure undermines children's self-esteem and erodes the educational process.

What role can schools play in combatting racism? As children grow up racist, the schools still have a chance to reeducate them. Some exemplary schools are training students to create a climate of antiracist peer pressure. And in a growing number of schools, new curricula promoting racial and ethnic awareness through multicultural education are turning diversity into opportunity.

What is racism?

Racism is a developed set of attitudes that include antagonism based on the supposed superiority of one group or on the supposed inferiority of another group, premised solely on skin color or race. Some authors suggest that racism and white racism may be synonymous. Defining bigotry as a primarily white problem does disservice in two ways. It ignores the fact that racist attitudes can breed in any ethnic group and it undermines the expressed goals of this decade's most promising solution—multicultural education. Celebration of diversity is a better foundation for racial harmony than is class guilt, says Charles Glenn (1989).

How do racial attitudes form?

Kenneth Clarke (in Mock 1988) details the developmental phases of racial attitudes in children. By age two, a child notices color differences. In the next two to four years, the child begins to identify with his or her own racial group. At that point she forms preference patterns on the basis of the prevailing attitude within the group and not by contact with a racially different group.

Parents are the earliest and most powerful source of racial attitudes (positive or negative), while peers run a close second (Savard and Aragon 1989). By the early grades every child carries at least some stereotyping.

Institutional and cultural prejudices are more subtle because they are embedded in unexamined assumptions and established procedures. The roots of these are multigenerational and can persist even after years of legislative remedies.

How extensive is racism in public schools?

In the progressively liberal, mostly white community of Eugene, Oregon, a study (Savard and Aragon) found that racism exists and may be on the increase. The report stressed the frequency of racial jokes and slurs, derogatory racial stereotyping, and (less often) violent acts left unpunished by school authorities.

Augustine Garcia (1989) notes that our innercities and areas of high density immigration (California, Florida) are experiencing the intimidation and irrational violence of Neo-Nazi skinheads and racial gangs. Children from dysfunctional families are particularly susceptible to peer pressure to adopt a racist posture.

It is not just the condescension and violence exhibited toward minorities that must be taken into account when looking at incidents of racism. Restrictions on minorities' opportunity to succeed are often racially determined. For example, Asian-Americans incur resentment for academic excellence and "overachieving." If racism is explicit at the street level of society, it is often implicit and equally entrenched at the highest levels.

How is racial prejudice reversed?

In addition to deeper curricular remedies, it is important to declare a public repugnance for racism. One such declaration, the Racism Free Zone, has been effective in Lane County, Oregon, schools. Developed by Clergy and Laity Concerned and modified from the Nuclear Free Zone concept, this program begins with a formal day of celebration. A plaque is prominently displayed that reads in part:

> We will not make statements or symbols indicating racial prejudice. Freedom of speech does not extend to hurting others. Racism will not be tolerated and action will be taken to ensure this.

White students acquire a feeling of ownership for this zone of protection, and minority students report a feeling of security and pride.

Far more ambitious is Project Reach, developed by the Arlington, Washington, School District (1986). This four-phased experience takes mostly white communities through human relations skills, cultural self-awareness, multicultural training, and cross-cultural encounters. Students research their own heritage to learn the fundamentals of culture; study other cultures through specially prepared booklets on black, Asian, Mexican, and native American heritages; and participate in field trips. Because Project Reach was developed for mostly white communities, it has received some national criticism for being too removed from practical racial cooperation. But given the demographic realities, communities must begin someplace.

Teachers can build tolerance in early childhood, says Barbara James Thompson (1989), by "role-playing a bus boycott, choosing the unknown contents of a beautiful box and a dirty box, and by encountering discriminatory signs in classroom activity." Such object lessons point out the hidden values in the child's assumptions and provide role-models worth emulating.

Resources for teaching about racism are listed by

EA 021 582

Samuel Totten (1989). These materials teach about the "destructive effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination."

How can administrators prevent racism?

Educators can employ several strategic, motivational, and confrontational means to change racist behavior. The following list incorporates some steps that have been proved effective (Diane Pollard 1989, Lloyd Foster 1989, James VanSciver 1989, and others).

1. Articulate a clear statement of expectations regarding racism.
2. Establish and enforce a series of consequences for violations of those expectations.
3. Respond to racial incidents quickly and fairly by gathering adequate evidence. Correction should be remedial.
4. Discourage students from congregating on the school grounds according to race.
5. Design seating assignments with a priority on integration.
6. Rely on peer counseling whenever possible.
7. Seek advice and support from parent and student advisory boards.
8. Enlist the help and advice of key minority leaders in the community for teacher workshops, assemblies, and arbitration of racial incidents when appropriate.
9. Reward those who strive to reduce racism in their schools and classrooms.
10. Hire and assign an appropriate balance of minority faculty and staff to act as role-models and provide an adequate base of authority for policies and discipline.

In addition, Kofi Lomotey (1989) advises school principals to communicate to teachers that *all* students can learn, focus on programs helping marginal students, broaden the base of recognized achievement by praising nontraditional work, and honor satisfactory work that represents an all-out effort by minority students.

How can schools preserve ethnic identity in the context of racial integration?

It is unnecessary to force a choice between integration of schools and the preservation of ethnic identity. In the Rafael Hernandez School in Boston, students work on shared learning tasks in the target language (English) without a double standard of performance expectations, says Charles Glenn (1989). Hispanics, blacks, and whites also work on Spanish and receive a positive message of its cultural value through drama and creative writing.

Of comparable importance are the programs, such as those offered by magnet schools, that encourage minorities to choose fields of math, science, and computer technology. The EQUALS program designs materials that help parents as well as teachers provide the motivation for minorities to excel in these areas (Hart and Lumsden 1989).

Glenn believes that a misunderstanding about the meaning of ethnicity and culture accounts for the reluctance of some educators to risk tampering with ethnic heritage. Ethnicity has to do with generational heritage and history. Culture, on the other hand, is the ideas, customs, and art of a people's living present. Culture is not static but rather a dynamic context for social life that all people have a right to shape. Multicultural education must distinguish between culture and ethnicity if it is to preserve minorities' ethnic identities while freeing them to participate fully in shaping the culture of society.

When these two concepts—ethnicity and culture—are made indistinct, schools can become encumbered with new stereotypes. Cultural relativity is the logical outcome. In this view, equal value is posited for all cultural and religious expressions. In contrast, good education allows students to pursue objective criteria for determining what is good or bad, valuable or useless in any particular culture. Racism *may* affect the way one regards another's culture or religion. But it does not follow that every articulated cultural or religious preference is racist.

Educators have gained many insights into the nature of racism. Multicultural education provides some excellent measures to root out prejudice and to foster appreciation for racial and ethnic differences.

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College of Education, University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403

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EA 021 582